

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1529

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, March 23, 2009

Title: An act relating to the delivery of home health care services through telemedicine.

Brief Description: Concerning telemedicine.

Sponsors: House Committee on Health Care & Wellness (originally sponsored by Representatives Seaquist, Hinkle, Morrell, Bailey, Moeller, Clibborn, Green and Cody).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/05/09, 96-0.

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 3/18/09, 3/23/09 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Keiser, Chair; Franklin, Vice Chair; Pflug, Ranking Minority Member; Becker, Fairley, Marr, Murray and Parlette.

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7465)

Background: Technology that transmits medical information between patients and health care practitioners has evolved over the last decade. One example of technology that connects patients at home with health care providers elsewhere is so-called "telemonitoring" where electronic devices used by the patient records and transmits vital signs and disease progression for the practitioner to observe. This kind of "telemedicine" is increasingly being used in the home health care industry where many of the clients being served are homebound elderly with chronic illness. Telemedicine technologies are capable of transmitting blood pressure information from hypertensive patients, blood sugar levels from diabetics, or weight checks from patients with cardiopulmonary disease. Other devices in patients' homes remind them to take their medications, or require them to answer questions about how well they slept or their pain levels. This information mimics what health care providers seek when they make a home visit. Home health agencies that monitor patients through "televisits" report better health outcomes for many of their clients.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): Any licensed home health agency that is eligible for reimbursement under the state's medical assistance programs may be reimbursed for home health services delivered through telemedicine. In-person contact between a home

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health care registered nurse and a patient is not required if the services are otherwise eligible for reimbursement as a medically necessary skilled home health nursing visit. The Department of Social and Health Services in consultation with home health care providers must develop reimbursement rules and define the requirements for reimbursable skilled nursing assisted through telemedicine.

Telemedicine is defined as a way to enhance the delivery of certain medical services through video, audio, or data communication instead of a face-to-face visit, or the collection of routine clinical data through electronic technologies.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): Language clarifies that registered nurses should be used when appropriate.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Substitute House Bill: PRO: This is the first step toward providing incentives for practitioners to use telemedicine when it is appropriate and valuable. Language clarifying nurse oversight is appreciated.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Leslie Emerick, Home Care Association of Washington; Sofia Aragon, Washington State Nurses Association.